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Ambassador Dobrynin

And, indeed, we find

AUGUST 4, 1952

The background of
Dobrynin, during
that I hoped to have a
the conversations at

I first told Dobrynin that I was glad to be able to review with him the present status of our discussions of the Berlin and German questions and that I would press attention to our interview might have thrown this first talk somewhat out of proportion. I told him that we had not, for example, taken for granted that our two Governments had agreed that there would be a "new round of talks" in Washington between him and myself. My clear understanding of the way Mr. Gromyko and I left it was that we would be in touch with each other about how further discussions might best go forward. I told him that we had no overriding preferences about whether these matters should be pursued in Washington or in Moscow; as he knew, Mr. Khrushchev had indicated to President Kennedy that Mr. Dobrynin had the Chairman's full confidence and was available for any exchanges we wished to undertake; similarly, Ambassador Thompson had our full confidence and could be in touch with Soviet authorities in Moscow on the same basis. Mr. Dobrynin indicated that he had had no instructions from Moscow on this point but that he would ascertain whether Moscow had any preferences and would be in touch with me again.

1 then proceeded to outline briefly where I thought we were in our talks. I said that, in the interest of clarification, it might be useful to think of our exchanges at three different levels.

The first had to do with what the Soviets have called "drawing a line under World War II". The Soviets had made proposals in 1958, and again in June of last year in Vienna, about how the Soviet Government would like

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to proceed with a permanent settlement on the German and Berlin questions. I told him that the West, too, had ideas about how this ought to be done. I mentioned proposals for reunification on the basis of free elections and related elements of previous Western positions with which he was familiar. I said that we had not pressed these proposals during this past year because we did not see, realistically, any prospect of agreement and that we did not think that it would improve the situation for the two sides simply to engage in a propaganda contest over irreconcilable positions.

The second "level" of exchanges had to do with the factual situation in Germany. When we on our side have mentioned such matters as reunification or all-Berlin arrangements, the Soviet side had spoken of existing facts. Usually, these facts were stated by Soviet representatives as meaning two Germanies. We, on the other hand, had insisted that there was another fact - our position in West Berlin and our free access to that city. I was glad that at Geneva the Soviet side seemed to recognize that the facts in the situation include both the two Germanies and West Berlin. One difficulty in our conversations thus far had arisen from the confusion between these two levels of discussion. When we talked about elements of a permanent solution, the Soviet side said, "But look at the facts". But when we turned to talking about facts, the Soviet side said, "But these must be changed".

A third level of discussion would concern itself with how we should manage the fact of disagreement if it became apparent that we could not come together either on a permanent solution or an agreement based upon existing facts. The working paper on general principles which I handed to Mr. Gromyko in Geneva was our suggestion as to how we might deal with the existence of underlying disagreement in such a way as not to move toward a dangerous crisis.

I then turned to the question of access and commented on the fact that we had not gone into considerable detail with each other on our respective proposals for an international access authority. Our difficulty with the working paper on this subject which Mr. Gromyko handed me at Geneva was that it was tied organically to the withdrawal of Western forces from West Berlin. We did not wish to leave any wrong impression through a detailed examination of a paper which seemed to be rooted in an underlying demand which we could not accept, namely, the removal of Western forces from West Berlin. I repeated to Mr. Dobrynin what I had said to Gromyko in Geneva, namely, that I did not see any fundamental difficulty in working out access arrangements which were consistent with what they called "the sovereignty of the GDR" and what we might call the responsibilities of local authorities. Our international access proposals were aimed at arrangements which would guarantee free access which would not interfere with activities in East Germany.

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We still were of the opinion that this was not an insolvable problem unless the Soviet side had in mind a type of East German control over access which could be used to throttle West Berlin.

I told Mr. Dobrynin that we were not entirely clear from our talks at Geneva about the connection between access arrangements and Soviet proposals for the withdrawal of Western troops. Mr. Khrushchev had seemed to make this connection quite specific. At Geneva, Mr. Semenov had indicated to Mr. Kohler that this was something "for the Ministers". When I questioned Mr. Gromyko on this matter he used a diagram to show that access was linked to the status of West Berlin and that the question of status was, in turn, linked to the presence of Western troops.

At this point Mr. Dobrynin said that "as of now" he would have to say that the "present position" of the Soviet Government was that agreement on access is linked to the presence of Western forces in West Berlin. "What the further attitude of my Government might be, I would not be in a position to say", he added.

I told him that I thought there might be some point in our exploring further the question of access provided it was understood by the Soviet side that we were not thereby changing in any way our attitude on Western troops. The latter was not a negotiable problem from our point of view. But it might be worth finding out whether the question of access could move toward more agreement even though the major issue remained in the background.

He asked where I thought we stood on some of the other "broader questions" which had been mentioned both at Geneva and in recent press accounts. I repeated the point that I had made to Gromyko in Geneva, namely, that if we could find a way of dealing with the central issues of vital concern to the West, I felt that a number of these other matters would fall into place. As he knew from reading the press of the last few days, we were in the process of consulting our allies. He laughed and said, "That is very evident".

It became clear from Dobrynin's conversation that he had had no instructions to continue further from where Gromyko and I had left off in Geneva, or, if so, had been instructed not to pursue the matter in this particular conversation. We agreed therefore, not just to reiterate to each other what Gromyko and I had said to each other at Geneva. In the course of general conversation, however, the following additional points came up:

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Dobrynin said that West Berlin was an outpost of the West capable of causing real trouble between us. He was not thinking of it as a strong military base but as a situation which could cause accidents or incidents of a dangerous sort. Therefore, it was in the interest of both sides to eliminate this source of trouble. He said that he was not clear just why we attach so much importance to our position in West Berlin - whether it was a question of prestige or just what it was.

I said that President Kennedy had covered this point in considerable detail with Chairman Khrushchev in Vienna. The President had pointed out the nature of our commitment to West Berlin and the effect upon our entire position if we were to permit that position to be eliminated or diminished. It would be wrong for the Soviet side to build its hopes upon the results which President Kennedy had clearly indicated we could not accept. I said that we felt that there might be some wishful thinking in some quarters of Moscow derived from the geographic location of Berlin. I had earlier told Mr. Gromyko that they could think about the political problems of Berlin more accurately if they imagined Berlin to be located on the demarcation line between the Federal Republic and East Germany. The geographical isolation of West Berlin was irrelevant because the Western allies were there and would remain there. I said that it would not surprise me to know, for example, that some Soviet military advice might be that this should be an easy problem; but it was not an easy problem, from that point of view, because the United States is in West Berlin.

Mr. Dobrynin and I exchanged a few words about President Kennedy's remark to Adzhubei that time might make some of these problems easier to solve. Dobrynin recalled Gromyko's remark to me at Geneva that time could work the other way. I said that I recalled that remark and that I had passed it by because Mr. Gromyko had referred to Hitler and I was quite sure that he did not intend to equate us with Hitler. Mr. Dobrynin said he was quite sure that was not Mr. Gromyko's intention. He asked how I saw time working to improve this principal point of confrontation between the two Governments. I said that time might ease their own pressures in East Germany; that time might make practical relationships in Germany more feasible and more conducive to a normal atmosphere; that time might make it possible to make some significant advances in disarmament, about which we were very serious. He asked me whether Berlin and disarmament are linked, I said they were not organically linked but obviously progress in one would help in progress on the other. He commented that the reverse could also be true.

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Again, on the effect of time I pointed out that President Kennedy had moved early in his Administration to try to create an atmosphere of calm in the relationships between our two Governments and, particularly, to restore effective contact between us. Even though we might not be able to agree on important issues, we had felt that responsible contact at all times was important. Dobrynin agreed and said that this had been much appreciated in Moscow and we mentioned the release of flyers, the cultural agreement and the variety of exchanges we have had as evidence of more effective communications. I told him that we thought that his own assignment in Washington as Ambassador was a step in improving communications, which he accepted with obvious pleasure.

I told Mr. Dobrynin that we were not unaware of the fact that shortly after Geneva the situation in West Berlin itself had significantly improved. I had said to Mr. Gromyko that we should be listener with both ears - with one to what is said, and with the other to what is done in Berlin; I was glad to see that matters had moved to a much more normal position there since Geneva and that we felt this was a wholesome contribution. He nodded acquiescence.

I told him that we were prepared to go ahead with conversations as anticipated by Mr. Gromyko and me at Geneva and that we were not on our side wishing to procrastinate - and reminded him of my exchange with Gromyko on that subject in Geneva.

My net impressions of this one hour's talk with Dobrynin were (a) he was not under instructions to pursue these questions on their substance; (b) he did not attempt to leave any impression that the Soviets were in any hurry; (c) he clearly did not attempt to leave any impression that they wished to move the matter to a crisis or showdown; (d) he was amused but entirely relaxed about the press flap out of Bonn; (e) he would report our conversation and be in touch with me again about any suggestions Moscow had about how the conversations might continue, and (f) he thought my outline of the three levels of discussion was a useful clarification and had thought so when I first presented it to Gromyko in Geneva.

He seemed equally relaxed about Laos, which he mentioned on his initiative just before leaving. I told him that it must be obvious to them that we were making serious efforts to support the idea of a negotiated coalition government, that we were having some difficulties with the RLG leadership and that we thought that it might take a little more time to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

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I told him that I had told the press for background that they should not expect too much from this meeting this afternoon, that this was our first contact since Geneva, that one of the matters we would be discussing in what way we might continue the discussions between our two Governments on these problems.

Dean Rusk

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